

## SOCIAL INEQUALITY EXAM QUESTIONS

1. Some scholars have debated whether Max Weber's analysis of social stratification was intended as a refutation of Karl Marx, or as a complementary thesis. Outline the similarities and differences between these two thinkers in terms of their analyses of class and social stratification. How does the empirical literature on social stratification and class from recent decades contribute to their debate?
2. Some sociologists argue that patterns of social inequality are more complicated now than they were at the time when Marx and Weber wrote their 'classic' statements about inequality in capitalist societies. What, if anything, can be salvaged from Marx and Weber's original analysis of the genesis and structure of social inequality in capitalist societies in the late 19th century to help us analyze modern capitalist societies?
3. Is economic inequality inherent to capitalist society? With this in mind, how and why does income inequality and social mobility differ across modern industrial societies? Finally, how is economic inequality legitimized, and why does this seem to occur to a greater extent in some countries than in others?
4. Some contemporary writers have argued that in the past, scholars (sociologists, historians, political economists) were concerned with uncovering the structural roots of inequality whereas today the debate has shifted to a concern about identity and subjectivity. Is this an accurate characterization of the field of social inequality? Explain why or why not by making reference to the readings from the social inequality reading list.
5. Some scholars have argued that in the last fifty years, we have witnessed a number of major transformations (for example, movement toward a service economy, the spread of sophisticated information technologies, an assault on the welfare state). Drawing on the Social Inequality reading list, discuss some of the major structural transformations affecting the nature and level of social inequality.
6. Arguably the most commonly identified social class, at least in popular writing, is the "middle class." Is the middle class a useful sociological category? What are the different ways in which the term "middle class" is used and understood by theorists of social inequality? Is the concept more compatible with some view (or views) of social inequality than with others?

7. How can we use the scholarship on social inequality to better understand gender inequality? What concepts might be useful to such a project? What additional conceptual tools are required to understand the social forces underlying gender inequality?
8. In the 1960s John Porter described Canada as a vertical mosaic. Some Canadian sociologists argue that this remains an appropriate metaphor for the description of contemporary Canadian society; others think that it is no longer a useful way of thinking about social inequality in Canada. To what extent is Porter's conception of the vertical mosaic still a useful way of describing Canadian society?
9. Recently, some sociologists and social historians have attempted to theorize the relationship between the various bases of social inequality in capitalist-patriarchal societies. These efforts are in large part a response to a growing political, as well as academic, awareness of the importance of gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as class, in people's lives. While the discussion of these different dimensions of inequality contribute to our understanding of social stratification, it poses a serious methodological challenge. On the basis of the readings, discuss the empirical problems in assessing the different bases of social inequality. In your view, do traditional (Marxist and non-Marxist) measures of inequality and stratification allow for an analysis of social inequality in its diverse forms?
10. Research on social inequality views inequality as either essentially continuous (for example, socioeconomic status) or discrete (for example, social class). Is this a fair characterization of the literature on social inequality? Are the two views necessarily opposed, or can they be reconciled? In your discussion, draw on specific examples from the research literature on social inequality.
11. There are a number of ways to understand gender inequality. Sociologists tend to focus on income inequality, especially wage inequality, inequality of access to social institutions, and the inequalities of lived experience caused by gender roles. How can we understand each of these forms of inequality, and how do they relate to each other? How can we apply the insights of the more general literature on social inequality to better understand each of these forms of gender inequality?
12. Scholars of social inequality seek to understand how racial and gender disparities in education and labour market outcomes are generated and how they might be reduced. What accounts for racial, ethnic, and gender differences in hiring, promotion, and pay? What types of social processes and state policies serve to preserve or remedy racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination? Have these forms of discrimination weakened or strengthened with the transition to advanced industrialism?

13. Social inequality scholars sometimes view the future of inequality in a benign and optimistic manner, presuming that history ultimately operates to reduce inequality, if somewhat sluggishly and intermittently. Drawing on the Social Inequality reading list, assess this benign narrative of the future of inequality. In your answer, consider why have some forms of inequality have seen reductions and others persist despite decades of egalitarian reform (e.g., antidiscrimination law).
14. The causes and consequences of inequality have been studied at multiple levels of social reality (i.e., micro, meso, macro). Select two statuses/categories from the reading list and discuss how inequality surrounding these statuses have been studied across various levels of social reality. Discuss the contributions and limitations of each perspective. Select the best examples from the reading list to demonstrate your points.
15. Work and family are key institutions of social inequality. Discuss how these institutions interact to produce and maintain inequality in modern times.
16. Assume that you are being asked to present an introductory lecture on the social inequality from a sociological perspective. How would you outline the nature of the field and its relationship to general sociological theory and methods? Use the best examples from the reading list to illustrate your points. Identify key gaps and strengths in the area.